{ See Note at end. }

UNITY

CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT,

FOR

FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

Series I. Chicago, November 8, 1884. No. 11.

THIS WORLD AS A TEMPLE.

BY REV. CHARLES G. AMES, MINISTER OF SPRING GARDEN UNITARIAN SOCIETY, PHILADELPHIA.

A precious piece of instruction is preserved to us in an ancient Hebrew tale. Jacob, the wily and selfish younger son of Isaac, is flying for his life from the anger of his brother Esau, whom he has overreached in a sharp bargain. With sad and gloomy thoughts, he lies down on the ground at night under the open sky; or perhaps under the shelter of an almond tree, for such is one meaning of the name "Luz," given aforetime to the place. As he slept he dreamed. Perhaps the star-rays slid down through his tired eyelids into his soul; for in his dream he saw a shining ladder leading from the earth up into the sky, and upon this ladder celestial beings were passing and repassing. Down through the spaces and out of the upper glory came a voice—the voice of the Eternal, the God whom his fathers worshipped. It seemed to him as he slept, and it still seemed to him after he waked, that he had found the exact spot where heaven and earth come together—a spot sacred to Deity above all others. "Surely," he said, "Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not." A thrill, almost of terror, ran through him, and he cried, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." And there he set up a little pillar of stone to mark the very spot where he had seen and heard the Eternal, and he poured oil on the stone to consecrate it. "And he called the name of that place Beth-El, the house of God; but the name of that place was called Luz, at the first." As time went on, a city grew around the traditional spot of Jacob's vision, and for two thousand years it bore the name Beth-El. Other centuries went by, and that name became a sort of religious symbol; for the Mohammedans apply it to their great temple at Mecca ("Beit-Allah"), and the Christians apply it to many a lowly place of worship.

But Jacob's consecrated pillar does not

*** Published Semi-Monthly, (except during July and August) by The Colegrove Book Co., 135 Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill. Ten or more copies to one address, each, 50 cts. a year. Single copy, one year, $1.00. Entered at the Chicago Post-Office as second-class matter.

stand alone in religious history. The Phœnicians also set up sacred stones, probably meteoric stones, which fell out of the sky. They poured oil upon them and called them *Beitulia*, which probably means the same as Beth-El, or "house of God."

Every object that has directed man's attention to the higher world or suggested spiritual powers and realities, has filled him with awe. Every spot where he has had an impressive vision or deepened feeling of the Maker's presence, has seemed sacred; there he has set up a memorial or built a temple. It was too much for him to feel the Divinity everywhere; it was a great experience to feel the Divinity anywhere. And we? God help us to open our eyes that *everywhere* we may see Beth-El!

There is more than one way to look at things. Take a cliff of limestone. To the traveller it may be now a shelter from the heat and now an obstruction in his path; to the suicide, a place to leap to death; to the geologist, a wonderful history and museum of ancient life; to the poet, a symbol answering to many moods —a symbol of the hardness of the human heart, or of the firmness of the human will, or of the stability against which all hostile waves beat in vain. When David found a refuge in a mountain cleft or cavern, he cried out, "God is my rock and my fortress."

Go and ask a dozen different persons by the seaside "What are the wild waves saying?" To some ears they say nothing but boom, boom, and swish-swash; to others, they sing "the chosen music of liberty." A thoughtful student watches the tide and collects reports from the forces of the earth, and moon, and sun, and stars, that pull and counterpull, and so will never let one drop in all the yielding mass of the ocean be still for a moment. If he is a poet, he seems to hear in the ripple and roar some echo of the music of the spheres, for he knows that those far-away powers in the sky are playing on the waves as if they were the keys of a piano. Two women sit there beside the sounding sea and listen till they dream—one of gurgling death-sounds and the beloved who return no more; the other of hopes that come like happy ships, treasure-laden, sailing out of bright, blue distances, from all points of earth and sky, every prow steadily pointing and every keel hastening to the desired haven. Thus the wild waves are echoing the thoughts of every listener—echoing the whisper or the rush of the feelings and passions that stir, with their deep undercurrent or surface-toss, this inward and vaster sea of the human spirit.

Is the world a temple? It is what we make of it. Eliza Sproat Turner has written a poem in which she portrays the different theories of life held by different creatures—the toad, the serpent, the bird, the man, the angel. They all live in the same world, but they cannot see and feel it in the same way. The toad lies bedded in stone, "cold and content," and to him life means nothing but rest and sleep. The serpent hisses that life means wakefulness and cunning secresy. To the bird, life is a happy song. To the man, it is a bearing of the cross —a strange mixture and medley of good and ill. And to the angel, who looks out of wise immortal eyes, it is still a mystery; but what can it be save the theatre of celestial wisdom and goodness and power?

So to us life is more than it can be to beasts, but less than it must be to higher beings. But it is not the same to all men, perhaps not to any two; it differs exactly as they differ. So when any one declaims against the world, he exposes *himself;* he is only letting us know what kind of a world *he* lives in. Some men can get a whole paradise and millennium out of a day; while others make perdition of it, or find in it nothing in particular, or only something which turns their mouth down at the corners. To one man it is a dark cave filled with stenchful gases, the walls dripping filth and the recesses infested with venomous things that creep

and hiss. To another, it is a dungeon, where he sits loaded with chains forged by his own selfishness, seeing the sunlight only through the gratings of his own evil habits. Another makes it a place to spread nets, like a spider. Mountford describes a tradesman who thinks the world is made for his shop to stand on, and all its streets and roads are for customers to come by. Some find in it only what birds and butterflies find—a scene wherein to sing and sport for a little time and then to vanish. But there are multitudes to whom it is a workshop, where they drudge themselves to weariness to find only the means of living at all, or keeping off the wolf of hunger and the dragon of despair. I know people to whom the world is like a bridge, spanning a bottomless abyss, both ends hidden in darkness; and they feel themselves hurried across it in the press of a vast throng, not one knowing whence nor whither, but all feeling the planks tremble under their feet. Others tread the world like the deck of a ship, bound on a voyage to Nowhere, now helplessly tossed on threatening waves, now as helplessly becalmed under scorching skies, and ever they are dreaming of green islands which never bless their waking eyes; life becomes a mockery and a mirage, love a phantom, truth a lie. I see some with timid, troubled faces, and others with visage stern and set, to whom life is a battle in the wilderness, with dangers and ambushes on every side, and nothing to do for it but to stand guard and give and take the hard blows of war. The roar and smoke of the conflict shake the earth and darken heaven, but now and then a rifted cloud gives a glimpse of the blessed blue and of the long peace that shall follow victory.

To all these men reality comes only in glimpses, in rare and elevated moments, or in calm, clear moods like the natural feeling of health in intervals of sickness, or like flashes of light in a long darkness. There are lucid intervals in our insanity when it is all clear that our world and our life must have a meaning worthy of the good and wise God. The ancients called the world Kosmos, *i. e.*, order, beautiful order; and in these moments of vision we are at least ready to believe that there *is* order, if only we could see things as they are; and so we grow suspicious that some blindness, or want of order, in ourselves, makes the universe seem chaotic and unmeaning. Humboldt called the whole creation, "the majestic realm of God." Is it not likely that his large and serene intelligence gained a truer view than can come to the unbalanced maniac? Has not the philosopher better judgment than the fool? the poet more insight than the clown? Did not Jacob's dream teach him more than he could learn by his eyesight? Is not the world better understood as a Beth-El than as a mere Luz? Look on it without faith, or hope, or love, and it is nothing but a Sahara, a landscape of desert without a sky.

If one man is more complete than another, he will think better of the world, and see nobler uses for it. As his thought climbs toward pure wisdom and his character toward pure goodness, he reaches an elevation of life which gives wider and clearer outlooks, and fuller assurance that all things are well ordered. But the order is there before we discover it. In the head of the unborn child there is a little jelly-ball which is meant to become an eye. But it will take time for the child's faculties to unfold so as to take right observations through that eye; longer still to gain the power of clear spiritual perception. But depend upon this: as any child or man improves in personal qualities, there will be increasing acceptance of the system of the world. A man who has been living a good life for nearly eighty years, says, "The older I grow, the more I see to inspire confidence and hope. Every bright thing looks brighter, every good thing better, every grand thing grander." Is not that man climbing Jacob's ladder? Every such advance in insight makes it easier to believe in what Tennyson says of the poet:

"He saw through life and death, through good an ill;
He saw through his own soul;
The marvel of the everlasting will,
An open scroll
Before him lay.
* * * * *
Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world
Like one great garden showed."

No miracle told of Jesus so thrills me with a feeling of the spiritual powers which were awake in him, and which may awake in us, as that blazing sentence which tells us that "the pure in heart shall see—shall see God." How all common things shone to his eye with the light that never was on land or sea! The grass of the field, the chattering sparrows, the hen covering her chickens, the sower scattering the seed, the fisherman and his nets, the sunburnt country women and their little children, the lighted candle and the red evening sky—they have all been preaching to mankind for eighteen centuries, simply because *he* looked on them with anointed eyes. Do not think that he exhausted this source of instruction, nor that he is the only Son of God whose eyes could be open. He is for me the first born among many brethren. And he has given us the recipe: "Take heed that the light that is within thee be not darkness!" As the light within us brightens, all creation will put on new splendors, for we shall see things as they are. The truth will make us free: free in spirit, free of the ugly bondage of selfishness and narrowness, and thus free as citizens of the larger kingdom.

Now we see how the world may become a temple. It must be idealized and transfigured by the inner light of the spirit. A temple is a sacred place; and the world will become sacred for us when we feel the sanctity of its right uses, when we live in it for high ends—when the food we eat, the air we breathe, the light by which we see, the houses we inhabit, the employments we follow, the recreations we enjoy, the property we handle, the part we take in trade and politics and education, in the family, in the church, and in society, are all accepted and employed as of divine appointment. For these things are of divine appointment, if anything is—they are so as truly as the furnishings and order of the heavenly world; and we are in our place here as the angels are there.

Rightly taken, then, everything around us is dedicated, *i. e.*, intended and devoted to some proper end. Therefore in learning by the help of study and experiment what things are good for, and how they can best be used, we are really learning obedience to the laws of God. All our life turns into worship when we set our hearts and our faces toward the light, as when we sincerely ask what is best to be done, under any given circumstances.

But the world ceases to be a temple, becomes vulgar and profane, when we pervert it to selfish uses and leave out of view the purpose to which it is dedicated. The sanctity is not in the building, but in the spirit of the worshippers. Think of a priest standing at the altar and slaying the sacrificial lamb with the feeling of a butcher! Think of the sacred precincts at Jerusalem infested with money-sharps and cattle-dealers, intent on driving a bargain! Think of the old Puritan meeting-house in Boston used by the British cavalry as a horse stable! Or think of the brutal soldiery knocking a rosewood piano to pieces for kindling wood, or of the oil portrait of your mother used to cover an ash barrel!

But all such outrages are just like the profanation of God's good world by our common life. Profanation consists in dragging things down from high uses to low ones, and it is only possible to a low state of mind. You would not disfigure your mother's portrait, nor break up the furniture in wantonness, nor smear the walls of your own parlor with slime—for you cannot degrade yourself by degrading these objects. Imagine what a change for the worse must come over you to make it possible!

But all unspiritual views of life imply such a degradation of man and the world.

We profane the inner temple, and then what can restrain us from profaning the outer one? We lose all sense of the sanctity of our own being, and then we can discover no sanctity in creation. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

To a worldling or an unspiritual man, property, trade, politics, his pleasures, his knowledges, his tastes, his domestic relations are finalities—matters about which he need only consult his own will. As the swine eat the nuts that fall from the trees, and never lift a thought to the beautiful miracle that feeds them, so we are apt to help ourselves to whatever creation offers, appropriating it all to the feeding of our own selfishness. We live in this great temple of God as the cavalry horses may have lived in the Boston meeting-house, as the mice may have lived by nibbling the sacramental bread and making soft nests of the leaves of hymn-book and Bible. The difference between such a mouse and an intelligent, devout reader of the books,—is it so much greater than the difference between the sensual and selfish use of this world and the using of it according to the Maker's laws and in the spirit of sweet reasonableness and gratitude?

Our life is coarse and crude and unsatisfactory, because we fail to perceive the moral meaning and uses of things—the fine facts of nature and of the soul. "Little we see in nature that is ours." We smile at Wordsworth's peasant, of whom he says:

> "A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And nothing more."

We pity the sordid money-making genius that can only think of Niagara as a great water-power, or which would gladly convert every open square of the city into house lots. I remember taking a little boy to the dome of a famous public building, hoping to please him with the superb prospect of earth and sea and sky and of half a dozen cities. But far below him in the street his eye was taken by a sight that eclipsed all the rest, and he shouted in childish delight, "O, see that pig!" Do we never meet grown-up people who miss the most beautiful and sublime spectacles of creation and the magnificent lessons and opportunities of a life-time, for substitutes quite as childish and trivial as the sight of a pig in the street?

The only way to get up is to look up. High thoughts lift us; low thoughts sink us. Respect for things above us draws us toward their level. An instructive fable tells us that men once walked on all-fours, like some other beasts. But they caught sight of the stars, and then the heavenly attraction lifted them to the human form. But some tell us that the human race has barely become human—that we have only within a few thousand years acquired this power of standing on our hind legs. Ah! if we lose sight of things above us, is there no danger that we shall lose our standing and learn again to grovel and creep? I can easily see how the noblest angel would drop from a celestial life to an inferior and finally an infernal one, if he were to lose sight of the glory that is above him by losing his reverence.

Nothing bears our life down and keeps it down so much as that want of reverence which blinds us to the temple-like sacredness of the world and the soul. It was said of Voltaire that he could sneer away a moral principle in a sentence. There are men who put out their own eyes and throw dust in the eyes of others by their light and scoffing speech; men who call morality a humbug, who laugh at those distinctions of right and wrong which sum up all the past progress of the race out of barbarism and beastliness, who curl their lips at the mention of love, and think it weak and foolish to bow our heads and our hearts in worship. They talk of life as if it were an empty sham; as if they had tested the world and found it only a great turnip, without blood or sugar. This may be a natural reaction from superstition—that blind religiousness which has made such multitudes of

idiots. But why must I put out my own eyes to keep a priest from blindfolding me? Irreverence is stone-blind. Like an owl, it "hoots at the sun, and cries 'Where is it?'" When reverence is gone, the bottom has dropped out. If a child has no respect for age, no regard for parental wishes and feelings, we can almost tell beforehand what bitter years are coming. If man or woman becomes shameless, we know that the inner rottenness has reached the heart. And for those who have no respect for the rights of others, nothing is left but stone walls and a keeper.

Reverence makes a soil in which all noble virtues can take root; and it is well worth while to keep that soil deep and rich, even if we must also fight the weeds of error and superstition. What is reverence? It is the faculty of appreciating worth. If it be unenlightened, it may lead us into the delusion of setting a high value on things that are unreal or worthless; but better this than to be incapable of esteeming the real and the precious. A wise reverence would hold everything for what it is. Then we should honor highly what is high, and value the lower things according to their grade of use and merit. But to honor high things we must look up and see them—we must believe in them.

Worship is that upward look; it is perception of the higher meanings in all things, a view of the spiritual aspect which all things present to the spiritual eye. It is not bowing our heads or bending our knees, nor repeating solemn words; it is an attitude and state of mind of which these acts are fitting outward signs. Worship is the soul's recognition of moral reality—its friendship and kinship for truth and goodness; its hunger for infinite beauty; its ever-repeated oath of allegiance to the moral order of the universe. God is never seen or felt, except as we see and feel Him through our reverence for what is like Him. There is deep and exhaustless meaning in the doctrine that the Father is revealed in the Son.

Through reverence we penetrate to this sacred secret that God is manifest in every thing that displays to us wisdom, love and power. Then the world grows holy; the sky-arch is a temple-dome; the outward pomp of night and day fill us with sublime feelings and thoughts; our common vocations and lowly duties take on the dignity of a ministry; we need no robed and mitred priest to monopolize the sacred offices; we stand at the altar as consecrated ones.

Along with this upward look toward higher things we shall come to a higher way of feeling about *all* things. When we once cast away all the petty insincerities which poison us; when we dare to trust the divine impulses which teach us to be genuine and free from pretence; when we are simply honest enough to recognize and honor all things according to their merit, and use them according to reason, how will it be possible for us to call anything common or unclean, secular or profane? All will share the sanctity of the temple, and we shall find religious help and moral meaning everywhere. No belittling awe or solemn terror will paralyze our powers, for the one eternal life will flow through us in vivifying streams of power, and we shall be, for the first time, truly alive. The preacher will no longer exhort us to leave the world and attend to religion, for we shall religiously attend to the world. What we do for ourselves, our families, our city and country, will itself be a form of divine service. The daily offering of body and spirit will be the acceptable sacrifice.

Till we come to this, or till we begin to move toward it, life itself will be a continous impiety, for we shall profane both the inward temple of the soul, and the outward temple of nature. We shall drag mind and body and estate down to base uses. Our bread will be poisoned, and our cup drugged, and like the serpent we shall crawl and eat the dust. We shall keep our craft and our cunning; but so will the fox and spider. We shall

still walk proudly; but so will the peacock. We shall enjoy a surfeit of worldly comfort; but so will the wallowing swine.

We must not walk all the time with our faces downward. With a low way of looking at labor, what can save it from being drudgery? At public affairs, what can politics be but a school of corruption and social disorder? At property, what can the making and spending of money be but thieving and snatching, covetous hoarding or wasteful extravagance? At sexual relations, what wonder that men and women live together with few noble satisfactions, and that children bring shadows into our hearts and our homes? At mankind, how little motive have we for treating them with justice and kindness!

Our crying need is a religion for every day uses—a church whose roof is wide as the sky, covering in all the facts and laws of the world, and all the faculties and experiences of human beings—a gospel that sets the foot of Jacob's ladder not only under some sacred tree, or on some holy mountain, or in the shadow of the historic cross, or in the footprints of some ascended saint, but everywhere that God's light shines, so that every man can start where he is, and climb by the help of Almighty grace where he ought to be.

No mere echo or mumbling of these things can save us from falling into an abyss of falseness and foulness. I remember wondering in boyhood whether the woman who baked the communion bread felt very solemn at her work; and I thought the sexton must half hold his breath while he set in order the furniture and books about the pulpit. But in the days when Roman Jupiter-worship was declining, one of the skeptical philosophers thought it strange that the soothsayers of the old religion could keep their faces straight, knowing, as they must, what a sham their ceremonies were. Alas for us, and for those who come next after us, if our faith in the sanctities has nothing better to hold by than perishing forms and dying traditions! If the Church becomes a mere antiquarian society, digging up and preserving the fossil remains of ancient saints, it will soon be only a ghastly tomb to hold their bones, and all men and women who care to keep alive will need to go outside for fresh air.

We still speak of "the Lord's Day," as if the other six days were all our own; and when we hear "the house of God" mentioned, it never occurs to us that it can mean our own dwelling, or our place of business, or the court of justice, or the public school. We still have just religion enough for some times and places, but not enough for all times and all places. What can it mean? Perhaps, like the ancients, we are not spiritually alive and sensitive, except at some points of our being; the feeling of sacredness can only be educated in us by a few consecrated objects, days and buildings.

"The Lord is in His holy temple." This sentence is written on the walls of churches, that all who enter may feel invited to meet Him with hushed spirits in the holy place. It is well, indeed, if sordid and profane men and frivolous women, as they pass under vaulted and shadowy arches, and hear the solemn thunder of the organ, should grow serious, even for one hour in a week, by being reminded that God is everywhere. But the impressions made by consecrated architecture and solemn music only delude the multitudes, who give themselves credit for religiousness when all their feeling is spent with the last amen, so that they go away with no deeper sense of what is due to their own souls and bodies, and to the bodies and souls of their neighbors. Blessed is the Sunday service which sanctifies the whole week; blessed the cathedral which sends us out under the open sky, and into our homes and shops, with a clearer assurance that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof."

The Jews worshipped in Jerusalem, the Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim. But what did Jesus say to the Samaritan woman? "The hour cometh when ye shall

worship the Father neither in this mountain nor at Jerusalem. * * * * The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." Places, times, ceremonies, all disappear; they blend with the grander whole, of which they are samples and reminders; the temple is everywhere, for everywhere the spirit of man meets the spirit of God.

Bear witness, dear friends, that I have spoken out of a happy faith that the universe is of spiritual origin, that it is under spiritual laws, that it exists for spiritual ends, and that it can only be understood by a spiritual interpretation. Nothing greatly concerns us except as it affects our spiritual welfare; but, therefore, everything concerns us, for everything may help or hinder our true life.

When we listen to the only Voice that can teach us anything worth knowing, we shall learn that we are born to a mighty inheritance. "If children, then heirs." But we cannot come rightly into possession of anything, except through having the spirit of Sonship in our hearts; that gives us admission to the world as our Father's house and ours. Then we shall belong to the Holy Family.

The creeds are too short. We must profess our faith in something more than second-hand revelations or revised reports of former wonders. We must not stop with believing in the Divine Sonship of one man who lived and died long ago; we must take up and bear onward the triumphal song of those who first caught his Spirit: "Beloved, now are *we* the children of God," and "the Father Himself loveth us!" Then it will be easy for us to accept this world as our home, our school and our temple. When we set ourselves in glad earnest to living wisely and worthily in this world, and to making it a good place for others to live in, it will grow dear to us as a *Home*, and we shall dwell in nature without fear or pride, or morbid questioning. When we bend our minds to learn the lessons that are appointed and taught to us through our senses, our bodily life, our social surroundings, and our exposures to toil, and pain, and moral trial, we shall find that the world is a *School*, that every day is an examination day, and at every moment our standing depends on our proficiency. We cannot miss a merit, nor a demerit, that we have justly earned. And when once the fire which falls from heaven, the fire of truth and love, burns on the inward altar of our hearts and consumes our selfishness, a glorious light will be reflected on all the world, and we shall know that we and God are dwelling together in a *Temple*, where all forms and facts are emblems of spiritual reality and where life itself turns to worship and service.

With such a home, such a school, and such a temple, how grand and glorious then are the possibilities of our life, and of almost every life and every day! We carry the key in our bosoms—the key to our ideal treasures. Seek first to *be* right, Jesus teaches, and all else will come right. It is not the prime question whether we shall be rich or poor, whether we shall be learned or ignorant, whether we shall be famous or obscure, whether we shall go abroad or stay at home, whether we can shape outward circumstances to our liking or not, whether we live or die; all these are important matters in their way, but their importance is secondary. They may *all* go against us, and yet we can make our *life* a high success. Put a perfectly clean heart and right spirit into any circumstances, and there is heaven. Let us only live as spirits, and then we shall share all things the Father of spirits has to give; we shall walk and talk and sleep and wake with God; and every Luz will be changed into a Bethel. This is no new gospel; it is the old story forever new.

> "The word unto the prophet spoken,
> Was writ on tablets yet unbroken;
> The word by seers or sibyls told,
> In groves of oak, or fanes of gold,
> Still floats upon the morning wind,
> Still whispers to the willing mind.
> One accent of the Holy Ghost
> The heedless world has never lost."